

Mr. Ford's Page

THE prophets are again at work trying to forecast what the business future will be, and it is not difficult to distinguish between those who are expressing their hopes and those who are expressing their convictions. Everyone, of course, hopes for the best, and there is a feeling that sunny talk will bring sunny days. But the people have lately had an experience with hard facts which will help them to require hard facts in any forecast which prophets may make of the future.

On the whole, the depression of the past few months, which began to lighten late in January and had made considerable amends by the end of April, brought a benefit which is difficult to speak about, because people are so averse to benefits which are received through suffering. People are able to understand how they may be physically better after a sickness than they were before, because they can see how the sickness brought to a halt certain practices which caused it, and rid the body of accumulated poisons. But in economic affairs their vision is not so clear, because it is not easy to relate one's own economic distresses to the general good.

The economic distress was not confined to a class. It was not only felt in the kitchen, it was as keenly felt in the office. No one prospers alone, no one is deprived alone. We are all partakers of the same general condition. If this were better understood, there would be more teamwork in pulling ourselves out of the economic mire.

There have been benefits which cannot be weighed or measured in material things but which yet have a very direct bearing on our material welfare, and if those benefits are only retained and if we continue to appreciate them, the future will be to that extent more promising than it might otherwise be.

Everybody is more sober. Everybody has a stronger sense of individual responsibility. This sense of responsibility may only express itself with relation to one's family or one's job, but that is enough to make it felt throughout the whole economic system. There is more self-government. Men are not toying with reality. They are not taking chances with fate. They are moving along the old, safe, dependable lines of honest work and sober living. This is a great gain over the former haphazard months when men thought the economic world would continue to go steadily on, no matter what they did.

More men are actually at work than before. In times of prosperity fewer men actually work than at any other time. The white collar sometimes imposes a burden on society out of all proportion to the service it renders, and there are now fewer white collars for the adornment of amateur speculators.

Take the large army of real estate speculators, for example. They were legion in times of prosperity. There is, of course, a legitimate business in real estate which is economically healthy and socially serviceable. But that is not the wildcat real estate speculation which was so rife during the hectic period of our so-called prosperity.

In a drunken, speculative period about 10 men must lose money in order that one man may gain. The injury, however, is not only that hard-working people lose their savings to the vendors of alluring real estate stories. That is bad enough; it is a situation which one would prevent at any cost. Savings are too sacred to be juggled with for the benefit of oily-tongued gamblers.

In the larger view, the money is not lost, though it is lost to the person whose it rightfully is. But it is not lost; society still has it. The real injury, however, from such transactions is that non-producers are allowed to live a little longer on society by reason of the money they have received from the men who came by that money in honest ways. The money enables them to impose themselves for

a little longer as a burden on society. They are allowed to use up the fruit of the earth, making no other return than their use of gambling wits.

Now, when the shake-down comes, it shakes this large army of parasites out of their places, detaches them from their "good things," and forces them to render actual work in exchange for what society gives them. This is a great relief of the social burden, also it is a measure of safety for those people who invest in dealers' stories instead of in solid values.

It is perfectly legitimate for people to invest their money. Some forms of investments are unavoidably speculative. No one positively knows how even a legitimate article is going to sell until the initial expense of producing and marketing it has been shouldered. But it is obvious that the man who has no capital but the little he has been able to save out of his earnings, should not be compelled to take chances. He should be permitted those channels of investment which carry with them the least chance of loss.

Someone has said that no man can gather much of a surplus on what he earns or what he saves, and that unless he can be connected some way with the profits of larger aggregations of capital, his chances of accumulating a competence are small.

This need is being met by making men partners in the business in which they are employed. It would make for industrial soundness if the principle were rigidly adopted that no man should be a partner in any business who is not employed in it. And the completing principle would be that every man worthy to be employed should be a partner, in the sense as participating in the total earnings of the concern. His wages are his individual earnings, but his labor contributes to the total earnings of the factory or mill, and in these he may share if he is permitted to make investments in the factory or mill. The healthy desire for investment, the economically sound principle of distribution, would thus both be satisfied. And in times of industrial depression, the man would know whether it was business or the boss that caused slackness. Moreover, when depression came the man would not expend his energy in useless condemnation of everything and everybody; he would form part of the group already existing who are trying to find out the cause of the cure of these senseless and stupid kinks in the line.

Many errors were made during the period when men were throwing up their jobs with utmost unconcern because jobs were plentiful. Extra money-prizes were offered to keep the men at their post of duty. Extravagant promises of paternal benefits were made by concerns who had never previously evinced the slightest interest in the welfare of their employes. And when slack times came, all these promises went by the board—except where they were an integral part of the whole working system of the concern.

Paternalism has no place in industry. Welfare work that consists in prying into employes' private concerns, is out of date. Men need counsel and men need help, oftentimes special help; and all this ought to be rendered for decency's sake; but the broad workable plan of investment and participation will do more to solidify industry and strengthen organizations than will anything else.

These are some of the benefits that have accrued from the last depression. Workmen are more sober-minded; managers see some problems more clearly. Our feet are on the ground. We are convinced that this whole period can be weathered through if we substitute co-operation for class condemnation. The right men in the engine-room and the right men in the wheelhouse brings the ship through safely.

TIMES are better, but we are not through the woods yet. Times will be better still if we keep the sober lessons learned in the months of depression. A generation is like a young man, he dissipates until he gets his bumps, but if he learns his lesson it will make a man of him. One hopeful sign: not only have the workers gone back in such large numbers to the job, but men who did not work during the "prosperity" have also gone back to the job. Prosperity always raises a small army of speculators who keep themselves above the necessity of toil by inducing honest working people to invest in things that never produce a return. Society's burden in carrying that crowd has largely been relieved; they are now producing what they use.